

The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexander Dumas

"The Count of Monte Cristo" appeared in 1844, when Dumas had been writing plays and stories for twenty years, and at a period when he was most extraordinarily prolific. In that year, assisted by his staff of compilers and transcribers, he is said to have turned out something like forty volumes! "Monte Cristo" first gave Dumas' novels a world-wide audience. Its unflagging spirit, the endless surprises, and the air of reality which was cast over the most extravagant situations made the work worthy of the popularity it enjoyed in almost every country in the world. The island from which it takes its name is a barren rock rising 2,000 feet out of the sea a few miles south of Elba. Dumas attempted to emulate Scott, and built a chateau near St. Germain, which he called Monte Cristo, costing over \$125,000. It was afterwards sold for a tenth of that sum to pay his debts.

I.--The Conspiracy of Envy

On February 28, 1815, the three-masted Pharaon arrived at Marseilles from Smyrna, commanded by the first mate, young Edmond Dantès, the captain having died on the voyage. He had left a package for the Maréchal Bertrand on the Isle of Elba, which Dantès had duly delivered, conversing with the exiled Emperor Napoleon himself.

The shipowner, M. Morrel, confirmed young Dantès in the command, and, overjoyed, he hastened to his father, and then to the village of the Catalans, near Marseilles, where the dark-eyed Mercédès, his betrothed, impatiently awaited him.

But his good fortune excited envy. Danglars, the supercargo of the Pharaon, wanted the command for himself, and Fernand, the Catalan cousin of Mercédès, hated Dantès because he had won her heart. Fernand's jealousy so took possession of him that he fell in willingly with a scheme which the envious Danglars proposed. Making use of Dantès' compromising visit to Elba, they addressed an anonymous denunciation to the *procureur du roi*, which, in this period of Bonapartist plots, was indeed a formidable matter. Caderousse, a boon companion, was at first taken into their confidence, but as he came to think it a dangerous trick to play the young captain, he refused to take part in it.

On the morrow the wedding-feast took place, and at two o'clock Dantès, radiant with joy and happiness, prepared to accompany his bride to the hotel de ville for the civil ceremony. But at that moment the measured tread of soldiery was heard on the stairs, and a magistrate presented himself, bearing an order for the arrest of Edmond Dantès. Resistance or remonstrance was useless, and Dantès suffered himself to be taken to Marseilles, where he was examined by the deputy *procureur du roi*, M. de Villefort. To him, on demand, he recounted the story of his visit to Elba.

"Ah!" said Villefort, "if you have been culpable it was imprudence. Give up this letter you have brought from Elba, and go and rejoin your friends."

"You have it already," cried Dantès.

Villefort glanced at it, and sank into his seat, stupefied. It was addressed to M. Noirtier, a staunch Bonapartist.

"Oh, if he knew the contents of this," murmured he, "and that Noirtier is father of Villefort, I am lost!" He approached the fire, and cast the fatal letter in.

"Sir," said he, "I shall detail you till this evening in the Palais de Justice. Should anyone else interrogate you do not breathe a word of this letter."

"I promise."

It was Villefort who seemed to entreat, and the prisoner to reassure him.

But the doom of Edmond Dantès was cast. Sacrificed to Villefort's ambition, he was lodged the same night in a dungeon of the gloomy fortress-prison of the Château d'If, while Villefort posted to Paris to warn the king that the usurper Bonaparte was meditating a landing in France.

Napoleon returned. There followed the Hundred Days, and Louis XVIII. again mounted the throne. M. Morrel's intercessions during Napoleon's brief triumph for the release of Dantès but served, on the restoration of Louis, to compromise further the unhappy prisoner, who languished in a foul prison in the depths of the Château d'If.

In the cell next to Dantès was another political prisoner, the Abbé Faria. He had been in the château four years when Dantès was immured, and, with marvellously contrived tools and incredible toil, had burrowed a tunnel through the rock fifty feet long, only to find that, instead of leading to the outer wall of the château, whence he could have flung himself into the sea, it led to the cell of another prisoner--Dantès. He penetrated it after Dantès had been solitary six years.

The prisoners met every day between the visits of their gaolers. Faria showed Dantès the products of his industry and ingenuity--his books, written on the linen of shirts, his fish-bone pens and needles, knives, and matches, all accomplished secretly; and beguiled much of the weariness of confinement by educating Dantès in the sciences, history, and languages. Dantès possessed a prodigious memory, combined with readiness of conception, and his studies progressed rapidly. Soon Dantès told the abbé his story, and the abbé had little difficulty in opening the eyes of the astonished Dantès to the villainy of his supposed friends and the deputy *procurer*. Thus was instilled into his heart a new passion--vengeance.

II.--The Cemetery of the Chatteau d'If

More than seven years passed thus when coming into the abbé's dungeon one night, Dantès found him stricken with paralysis. His right arm and leg remained paralysed after the seizure. When Dantès next visited him the abbé showed him a paper, half-burnt, and rolled in a cylinder.

"This paper," said Faria, "is my treasure; and if I have not been allowed to possess it, you will. Who knows if another attack may not come, and all be finished?"

The abbé had been secretary to the last of the Counts of Spada, one of the most powerful families of mediaeval Italy, and he, dying in poverty, had left Faria an old breviary, which had been in the family since the days of the Borgias. In this, by chance, Faria found a piece of yellowed paper, on which, when put in the fire, writing began to appear. From the remains of the paper he made out during the early days of his imprisonment, that a Cardinal Spada, at the end of the fifteenth century, fearing poisoning at the hands of Pope Alexander VI., had buried in the Island of Monte Cristo, a rock between Corsica and Elba, all his ingots, gold, money, and jewels, amounting then to nearly two million Roman crowns.

"The last Count of Spada made me his heir," said the abbé. "The treasure now amounts to nearly thirteen millions of money!"

The abbé remained paralysed, and had given up all hope of enjoying the treasure himself; and presently another seizure took him, and one night Dantès was alone with the corpse.

Next morning the preparations for burying the dead man were made, the body being placed in a sack and left in the cell till the evening. Dantès came into the cell again.

"Ah!" he muttered. "Since the dead leave this dungeon, let me assume the place of the dead!"

Opening the sack, he took out the dead body of his friend, and dragged it through the tunnel to his own cell. Placing it on his own bed, he covered it with the rags he wore himself. Then he sewed himself in the sack with one of the abbé's needles. In his hand he held the dead man's knife, and with palpitating heart awaited events.

Slowly the hours dragged on, until at length he heard the heavy footsteps of the gaolers descending to the cell. They lifted the sack, and carried him on a bier through the castle passages, until they came to a door, which was opened. On passing through this, the noise of the waves was heard as they dashed on the rocks below.

Then Dantès felt that they took him by the head and by the heels, and flung him into the sea, into whose depths he was dragged by a thirty-six-pound shot tied to his feet. The sea is the cemetery of Château d'If!

Although giddy, and almost suffocated, he had yet sufficient presence of mind to hold his breath; and as his right hand held his knife, he rapidly ripped up the sack, extricated his arm, and then, by a desperate effort, severed the cord that bound his legs at the moment he was suffocating. With a vigorous spring he rose to the surface, paused to breathe, and then dived again, in order to avoid being seen. When he rose again, he struck boldly out to sea, and, fortunately, was picked up by a sailing-vessel.

Now at liberty, fourteen years after his arrest, he renewed an oath of implacable vengeance against Danglars, Fernand, and Villefort. Nor was it long before he had discovered the secret cave in the island of Monte Cristo, with all its dazzling wealth, as the Abbe Faria had truly foretold. He now stood possessed of such means of vengeance as never in his wildest dreams had any innocent prisoner hoped to be able to command.

III.--Vengeance Begins

Some two years later Caspar Caderousse, the keeper of an inn near Beaucaire, was lounging listlessly at his door, when a traveller on horseback dismounted at his door and entered. The visitor--Monte Cristo--gave the name of Abbe Busoni, and astonished Caderousse by showing a minute knowledge of his earlier history. The abbé explained that he had been present at the death of Edmond Dantès in prison, and said that even in his dying moments the prisoner had protested he was utterly ignorant of the cause of his imprisonment.

"And so he was!" exclaimed Caderousse. "How should he have been otherwise?"

The abbé had heard of the death of Edmond's aged father, and now he was told the old man had died of starvation.

"Thus Heaven recompenses virtue," said Caderousse. "I am in destitution and shall die of hunger, as old Dantès did, whilst Fernand and Danglars roll in wealth. All their malpractices have turned to luck. Danglars speculated and made a fortune. He is a millionaire, and now Count Danglars. Fernand played traitor at the battle of Ligny, and that served for his recommendation to the Bourbons. Afterwards he became Count de Morcerf, and got a considerable sum by the betrayal of Ali Pasha in the Greek war of independence."

The abbé, making an effort, said, "And Mercédès--she disappeared?"

"Yes, as the sun, to rise next day with more splendour. She is rich, the Countess de Morcerf--she waited two hopeless years for Dantès--and yet I am sure she is not happy."

"And M. de Villefort?" asked the abbé.

"Some time after having arrested Dantès, he married and left Marseilles; no doubt but he has been as lucky as the rest."

"God may seem sometimes to forget for a time," said the abbé, "while His justice reposes, but there always comes a moment when He remembers."

Early in 1838 a certain Count of Monte Cristo became a great figure in the life of Paris. His name awakened thoughts of romance and dazzling wealth in the minds of all. It was Albert, the son of the Count de Morcerf, who first introduced the Count of Monte Cristo to the high society of Paris. They had become acquainted at Rome, where Monte Cristo had been able to render a great service to the Viscount Albert de Morcerf and his friend, the Baron Franz d'Epinau.

All sorts of stories were afloat in Paris as to the history of this Count of Monte Cristo. When he went to the opera he was accompanied by a beautiful Greek girl, named Haidée, whose guardian he was.

But nothing ruffled Monte Cristo. Calmness and deliberation marked all his movements; in some respects he was more like a machine than a human being. Everything he said he would do was done precisely. And now the schemes he had long studied in secret he had begun to carry through as certainly and relentlessly as Fate.

M. de Villefort, now *procureur du roi*, had a daughter by his first wife, for he had married a second time. Her name was Valentine, and at the command of her father, but not by her own wish, she was engaged to the Baron Franz d'Epinau. She loved a young military officer named Maximilian Morrel, a son of the Marseilles shipowner. But neither of them had dared to avow their affection for each other to Valentine's father.

Meanwhile, the tide of fortune seemed to have turned with Baron Danglars. His business had suffered many losses, but his greatest loss of all was due to some false news about the price of shares which had been telegraphed to Paris by means which Monte Cristo could have explained.

The baron's daughter was engaged to Albert de Morcerf, but the Count of Morcerf had now come under a cloud, for his betrayal of Ali Pasha had been made public; and perhaps the Count of Monte Cristo could have told how the truth came out at last. So the baron did not hesitate to break the engagement, and to accept as the suitor for his daughter a dashing young man known as Count Cavalcanti, who had been introduced to Paris by Monte Cristo, but concerning whose antecedents nothing seemed to be known.

The Count de Morcerf was tried for his betrayal of Ali, and seemed likely to be acquitted, when a veiled woman was brought to the place of trial, and testified before the committee that she was the daughter of Ali Pasha, and that Morcerf had not only betrayed her father to the Turks, but had sold her and her mother into slavery. The veiled woman was Haidée, the ward of Monte Cristo. The count was now a ruined man, and when his son Albert discovered the part that Monte Cristo had played, he publicly insulted the count at the opera.

A duel was averted, for Albert publicly apologised to the count when he learned the reasons for his actions. Furious that he had not been avenged by his son, Morcerf rushed to the house of Monte Cristo.

"I came to tell you," said Morcerf, "that as the young people of the present day will not fight, it remains for us to do it."

"So much the better," said Monte Cristo. "Are you prepared?"

"Yes, sir; and witnesses are unnecessary, as we know each other so little."

"Truly they are unnecessary," said Monte Cristo, "but for the reason that we know each other well. Are you not the soldier Fernand who deserted on the eve of Waterloo? Are you not the Lieutenant Fernand who served as guide and spy to the French army in Spain? Are you not the Captain Fernand who betrayed, sold, and murdered his benefactor, Ali?"

"Oh," cried the general, "wretch, to reproach me with my shame! Tell me your real name that I may pronounce it when I plunge my sword through your heart."

At this Monte Cristo, bounding to a dressing room near, quickly pulled off his coat, and waistcoat, and, donning a sailor's jacket and hat, was back in an instant.

Gazing for a moment in terror at this man who seemed to have risen from the dead to avenge his wrongs, Morcerf turned, seeking the wall to support him, and went out by the door uttering the cry--"Edmond Dantès!"

Events marched rapidly now, and Paris had scarcely ceased talking of the suicide of the Count de Morcerf, when Cavalcanti, identified as a former galley-slave named Benedetto, was arrested for the murder of a fellow-convict.

Danglars fled from France, his great business in ruin. With him he took a large sum of money belonging to Paris hospitals, which, however, was taken from him near Rome by brigands controlled by Monte Cristo.

IV.--Vengeance is Complete

In the household of Villefort, Monte Cristo had done nothing to bring vengeance on that evil man. He had seen from the first that Villefort's second wife was studying the art of poisoning, and he felt that revenge was already at work here. There had already been three mysterious deaths in the house, and now the beautiful Valentine seemed to be suffering from the early effects of some slow poison. Maximilian Morrel, in despair of Valentine's life, rushed to Monte Cristo for his advice and assistance.

"Must I let one of the accursed race escape?" Monte Cristo asked himself, but decided, for Maximilian's sake, that he would save Valentine. He had bought the house adjoining that of Villefort, and, clearing out the tenants, had engaged workmen to remove so much of the old wall between the two houses that it was a simple matter for him to take out the remaining stones and pass into a large cupboard in Valentine's room. Here the count watched while Valentine was asleep, and saw Madame de Villefort creep into the room and substitute for the medicine in Valentine's glass a dose of poison.

He then entered the room and threw half the draught into the fireplace, leaving the rest in the glass. When Valentine awoke he gave her a pellet of hashish, which made her sink into a deathlike sleep.

Next morning the doctor declared that Valentine was dead. In the glass he discovered poison, and as the same poison was found in madame's laboratory, there was no doubt of her guilt. She admitted all, and confessed that her object had been to make her own son sole heir to Villefort's fortune.

Madame de Villefort fell at her husband's feet. He addressed her with passionate words of reproach as he turned to leave her.

"Think of it, madame," he said; "if on my return justice has not been satisfied, I will denounce you with my own mouth, and arrest you with my own hands! I am going to the court to pronounce sentence of death on a murderer. If I find you alive on my return, you shall sleep to-night in gaol."

Madame sighed, her nerves gave way, and she sank on the carpet.

But Villefort little knew at the moment he spoke these burning words to the woman who was his wife that he himself was not going out to condemn a fellow-sinner, but to be himself condemned. For the man

to whom he referred as a murderer was the so-called Count Cavalcanti, really Benedetto, who now turned out to be an illegitimate son of Villefort's whom he had endeavoured to bury alive as an infant in the garden of a house at Auteuil. The night before the criminal had had a long interview with Monte Cristo's steward, who had disclosed to the prisoner the secret of his birth, and in court he declared his father was Villefort, the public prosecutor! This statement made a great commotion in the court, and all eyes were on Villefort, while Benedetto continued to answer the questions of the president, and proved that he was the child whom Villefort would have buried alive years before. The public prosecutor himself confirmed the prisoner's story by admitting his guilt, and staggering from the court.

When Villefort arrived at his own house he found everything in confusion. Making his way to his wife's apartments, he had the horror of meeting her while she still lived, just at the very instant when the poison she had taken did its work, and of finding a moment or two after that she had poisoned his little son Edward.

This was more than the brain of man could endure, and Villefort turned from the tragic scene a raving madman, rushing wildly to the garden, and beginning to dig with a spade.

The vengeance of Edmond Dantès, so long delayed, so carefully and laboriously planned, was now complete, and it only remained for him to perform the last of his marvels, at the same time giving proof of his boundless generosity. Valentine de Villefort had been buried, and Maximilian was in despair; but Monte Cristo urged the young man to have patience and hope.

It seemed a strange thing to ask a lover whose sweetheart had been placed within the tomb to have hope and to come to Monte Cristo in one month. But this was the bargain they made.

When the month had passed, Maximilian came to the isle of Monte Cristo.

"I have your word," he said to the count, "that you would help me die or give me Valentine!"

"Ah! A miracle alone can save you--the resurrection of Valentine! Thus do I fulfil my promise!"

Monte Cristo turned to a jewelled cabinet, and took from it a tube of greenish paste. Maximilian swallowed some of the mysterious substance, which was but hashish. He sat down and waited.

"Monte Cristo," he said, "I feel that I am dying--good-bye!"

Meanwhile, Monte Cristo had opened a door from which a great light streamed. Maximilian opened his eyes, looked towards the light; and then--he saw Valentine!

Then Monte Cristo spoke. "He calls you, Valentine, even as he thinks he dies by his own will. But even as I saved you from the tomb, so have I saved him. I feared for his reason if he saw you, except in a trance--from his trance he will wake to happiness!"

Next morning Valentine and Maximilian were walking on the beach, when Jacopo, the captain of Monte Cristo's yacht, gave them a letter. As they looked on the superscription they cried, simultaneously, "Gone!"

In his letter, Monte Cristo, said: "All that is in this grotto, my friend, my house in the Champs Elysées, and my château at Tréport, are the marriage gifts bestowed by Edmond Dantès upon the son of his old master, Morrel. Mademoiselle de Villefort will share them with you; for I entreat her to give to the poor the immense fortune reverting to her from her father, now a madman, and her brother, who died last September with his mother."

"But where is the count?" asked Morrel eagerly. Jacopo pointed towards the horizon, where a white sail was visible.

"And where is Haidée?" asked Valentine. Jacopo still pointed towards the sail.

Source:

Dumas, Alexander. "The Count of Monte Cristo." *The Worlds Greatest Books*. Ed. Arthur Mee, J.A. Hammerton. Vol. 3. 1910. Electronic.